

US-93, I-84 TO SH-25 JEROME COUNTY, IDAHO

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This Environmental Assessment (EA) is being prepared as part of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and is sponsored by the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). It presents the analyses on how proposed roadway improvements on US-93 from I-84 north to SH-25 will affect the natural and built environments. The EA discloses information about existing resources and identifies potential effects resulting from the proposed Project. It serves as documentation of the environmental review process including public and agency input on the proposed Project, the recommended design for roadway improvements, potential effects, and recommended mitigation measures.

The proposed Project on US-93 is located in Jerome County in south-central Idaho. The 6.1 mile Project begins at milepost (MP) 53.3 at the westbound I-84 on- and off-ramps and extends north to MP 59.4 just north of SH-25 and the Jerome County Airport. It serves the residential and commercial traffic of the urbanized Twin Falls and Jerome areas, the surrounding agricultural cities and towns, and the traffic to and from the Sun Valley Resort located 75 miles to the north in Ketchum, Idaho. It is also within the Jerome County Commercial Overlay Zone where commercial and light industrial development is anticipated to occur. It also is a major regional highway that extends south to Arizona and north to Montana.

PURPOSE AND NEED

Purpose

The purpose of this Project is to:

- Increase US-93 roadway capacity to accommodate existing and future year 2030 vehicle traffic; and
- Increase transportation safety for all users.

Need

The need for this Project is based on the following factors:

- Predicted future year 2030 peak hour traffic demand exceeds available transportation capacity;
- The US-93 Project Corridor has been designated a Commercial Overlay Zone (COZ)¹ by Jerome County. The existing two lane facility will not accommodate the operations associated with future development;
- US-93 must provide a safe transportation facility for agricultural operations and residents until these properties develop as commercial facilities; and

¹ The Jerome County Comprehensive Plan states that the Commercial Overlay Zone is to "provide for and to encourage the grouping together of businesses, public and semi-public, and other related uses...and will be compatible to this highway corridor." Therefore, the major objective of the Commercial Overlay Zone is to spur economic development within the county and to help facilitate local transition from a largely rural, agricultural-based community to a more diversified economy.

- Currently no bicycle and pedestrian accommodations exist; the Project will provide a separated shared bicycle and pedestrian facility.

OBJECTIVES

Due to the anticipated problems caused by forecast traffic volumes and crashes, ITD proposes to make roadway improvements on US-93 between I-84 and SH-25. The objectives for these improvements include the following:

- Provide a transportation facility that meets current roadway standards and improves safety;
- Provide a transportation facility that accommodates projected traffic volumes;
- Provide a transportation facility that operates at acceptable level of service (LOS) and meets ITD standards;
- Provide a transportation facility that can accommodate access management concepts;
- Provide a safe railroad crossing that includes appropriate sight distance, signage, and signalization;
- Provide appropriate roadway design at intersections, access points, and hills;
- Provide acceleration and deceleration lanes and increase shoulder widths to accommodate slower and oversized vehicles for personal, commercial, and agricultural users; and
- Minimize potential impacts to the natural and built environment.

The need to increase the traffic capacity of US-93 is partially based on an analysis of existing traffic volumes and accidents. Generally, the existing engineering design of the highway, the lack of turn lanes and traffic signals, and the existing traffic volumes allow the existing roadway to meet ITD standards for acceptable LOS (C or better). Peak traffic volumes, however, warrant the installation of a traffic signal at the proposed 500 South intersection located just north of the Crossroads Parkway. Crash severity in the north portion of the highway corridor between 200 South and SH-25 exceeds statewide averages and requires improvements.

If no improvements are made to the highway and anticipated development occurs along the highway corridor, then the overall LOS will decline markedly as traffic volumes nearly triple and exceed the existing highway capacity. Congestion along the entire corridor will increase, traffic delays will increase, and crashes will increase due to higher traffic volumes. Analysis performed for this EA confirmed that the LOS of the highway corridor will be below the ITD standard for acceptable roadway performance. The roadway must be improved to manage access.

ALTERNATIVES

The initial range of conceptual alternatives for improving US-93 between I-84 and SH-25 was evaluated in the *US 93 Needs Assessment* (W & H Pacific 2002). This report evaluated a total of five corridor improvement options, including the following:

- Option #1 – No Build;
- Option #2 – 5-lane Improvement, Continuous Left Turn Lane, Standard Access;

- Option #3 – 5-lane Improvement, Continuous Left Turn Lane, Partial Control Type II Access;
- Option #4 – 5-lane Improvement, Continuous Median Channelization, Partial Control Type III Access; and
- Option #5 – 4-lane Improvement, Partial Type IV Access, No Direct Private Access.

After considerable discussion, members of the public and government agency representatives recommended dropping Option #2 because the continuation of the existing standard approach to access would not support the Project objectives. For the remaining three build options, an evaluation was conducted to compare and contrast these options to the No Build option. The analysis for each option included the preparation of 20-year travel forecasts. These forecasts were followed by evaluation of level of service (LOS) for roadway segments and intersections, traffic delay at intersections, signal warrant analysis, and railroad crossing assessments. The *US-93 Needs Assessment* provides the details of this analysis.

Based on the analysis and comparison of the Project options, Option #5 was considered the best; Option #4 was second and Option #3 was the least desirable of the three build options. To develop the final recommendation, additional public and agency input was again considered for the three build options and an initial review of potential environmental impacts was performed. Environmental impacts were minor for all options and therefore, not considered a differentiating factor between alternatives. Throughout the process, public reaction had been unfavorable toward Option #5 because of the very limited access to commercial development. Local government agencies also discussed the large amount of public road right-of-way needed for this option. Ultimately, the local government agencies concluded that Option #5 could be problematic. Due to these reservations, ITD decided that Option #4 should be adopted as the conceptual plan for making improvements to US-93 between I-84 and SH-25.

DESCRIPTION OF THE BUILD ALTERNATIVE

The Build Alternative (Preferred Alternative) consists of widening the highway to four through lanes, two lanes in each direction with a center turn lane median. Key aspects of the roadway improvements include the following:

- Existing 120- to 600-foot right-of-way will generally be used to build the Project, using a minimum of 300 feet, except in a few locations where the right-of-way used would be less. The narrower sections would avoid impacts to existing buildings or adjacent historic properties.
- Relocate the existing intersection at Crossroads Parkway and 500 South to align with the proposed Crossroads Boulevard entrance to the Crossroads Point Business Center now under construction.
- Improve existing intersections with US-93 at 400 South, 300 South, 200 South, 100 South, and SH-25.
- Coordinate with Eastern Idaho Railroad (EIRR) to improve crossing of the track by US-93.
- Construct a 20 foot wide paved shared use trail on the west side of the highway.
- Modify the existing canal crossings on US-93 between I-84 and SH-25 to accommodate the revised highway alignment. Modifications may include: widening

existing bridges, constructing new bridges, relocation of the canal bed and/or access roads, construction of an additional bridge structure for the proposed shared use trail, and installation of a barrier between the highway and the shared use trail.

- Install traffic signals at the public road intersections on US-93 when traffic volumes warrant signals. Installation of a signal at the future 500 South intersection (relocated Crossroads Parkway) will be part of the proposed roadway construction activities.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT, POTENTIAL EFFECTS, AND MITIGATION

Table ES-1 summarizes the existing conditions, potential effects, and recommended mitigation measures for the proposed US-93 Corridor Project.

Table ES-2 summarizes the potential temporary construction impacts and mitigation measures.

TABLE ES-1. SUMMARY OF NO BUILD AND BUILD ALTERNATIVE POTENTIAL EFFECTS AND MITIGATION

Affected Environment and Environmental Issues	Environmental Consequences		Mitigation
	No Build	Build Alternative	
Transportation US-93 is a Principal Arterial that is a major north-south route in south-central Idaho. It serves local, regional, and interstate travel needs for individuals, businesses, and freight. Locally, the Project corridor links the cities of Twin Falls, Jerome, and Shoshone.	Future traffic volumes will exceed roadway capacity. This will increase travel time and transportation costs for local residents, businesses, and freight transport. As volumes increase, the number of crashes is also anticipated to increase.	Proposed roadway improvements will meet 2030 traffic demand, provide LOS C or better, and maintain public safety. The Project will not affect the airport, but will require modification of the railroad crossing by the Eastern Idaho Railroad (through separate utility agreement). The proposed improvements include a shared use trail.	None.
Land Use and Relocations Existing land uses along the Project corridor include rural residential, agricultural, business/commercial, open space, and private recreation. US-93 between I-84 and SH-25 extending ¼ mile to the east and west has been designated a Commercial Overlay Zone. The main purpose of this zoning designation is to attract businesses and generally stimulate economic growth in the area.	None.	Proposed roadway improvements are consistent with local government plans and zoning ordinances. The Project will require the purchase of both land and structures. A total of 54 acres of land will be acquired, including one residence and several agricultural outbuildings. One commercial building may be acquired.	Property will be acquired in accordance with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Act. Relocation resources will be made available to all without discrimination.

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Affected Environment and Environmental Issues	Environmental Consequences		Mitigation
	No Build	Build Alternative	
Agriculture and Farmlands The main land use along the corridor is agriculture. The water needs are served by the K Coulee Canal, L Canal and its associated laterals L4A, L4, L3, and L2, and the D5 Ditch. All the existing farmland is considered either Prime, Unique, or of Statewide Importance by the NRCS.	None.	A total of 47.8 acres of agricultural land designated prime farmland will be converted from agricultural use. The effect of purchasing the slivers of land from individual property owners is not substantial considering the large size of properties. Agricultural productivity will not change.	Water delivery systems and irrigation ditches, canals, and ponds will be reconstructed and/or relocated as part of the proposed Project to maintain on-going and long-term use.
Economic Environment The major economic centers of south-central Idaho include Twin Falls and Jerome City. Jerome lies to the north approximately ten miles. Several highway-oriented and building industry businesses are adjacent to the US-93 Project corridor.	None.	Consistent with the county's plan to develop the US-93 corridor into a regional, commercial, industrial, and business center.	None.

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<i>Affected Environment and Environmental Issues</i>	<i>Environmental Consequences</i>		<i>Mitigation</i>
	<i>No Build</i>	<i>Build Alternative</i>	
Social The proposed highway improvements would occur in unincorporated Jerome County, which is transitioning from a rural agricultural county to a more urbanized area due to commercial rezoning. The county's population has experienced steady growth over the last 15 years. Growth is anticipated to continue. Based on 2000 census data, racial and ethnic minorities as well as low-income persons clearly reside in the Project study area. The percent of the population that is a racial or ethnic minority, however, is markedly lower than the demographic characteristics for Jerome County. The Project study area, however, has a higher proportion of the population that resides at or below the federal poverty level compared to county-wide statistics, despite the statistics that indicate that the median household income for residents in the Project study area is slightly greater than for all households in the county.	None.	Since the Project only requires the relocation of one residence and no minority or low-income populations have been identified there will be not disproportionate impact to minority or low income groups. Therefore, this Project is consistent with the provisions of Executive Order 12898 that disproportionately adverse effects on minority and low-income populations and community have been avoided.	None.

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Environmental Issues and Description	Potential Effects		Mitigation
	No Build	Build Alternative	
Cultural Resources 17 historic properties are located in the Project area; a total of nine sites are considered eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Of these, two are already listed on the NRHP. There are no archaeological sites along the Project corridor that qualify for listing on the NRHP.	None.	Cultural resources along the Project corridor will be avoided, except for the K Coulee Canal, Oregon Short Line Railroad (EIRR), L Canal, and the D5 Ditch. These will remain operational during the construction, but will require modification. All effects are considered a No Adverse Effect by SHPO. The effects are minor and will not detract from the qualities that make them eligible for listing on the NRHP. FHWA has determined impacts to 4(f) resources are <i>de minimus</i> .	None.
Visual and Aesthetic Characteristics The Project area is characterized as gently rolling topography. It is dominated by large agricultural fields with several residences and associated farm buildings. There are few trees or shrubs. Some business and commercial establishments are located adjacent to the highway corridor. Mountains are visible in the distance.	None.	The proposed highway improvements will increase the width of the roadway pavement. One residential structure will be displaced and removed from the landscape. Views from the highway will not change, but views of the highway will change due to widening and the new shared use trail.	None.
Air Quality The Project area is located in an attainment area as air quality meets current standards.	None.	None.	None.

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	No Build	Build Alternative	
Noise A total of 16 sensitive noise receptors were modeled using Traffic Noise Model (TNM). These receptors include the KOA campground, a mobile home park, and other multi-receptor sites. The TNM model predicts noise impacts resulting from this Project.	Increased traffic volumes will result in 7 receptors to be at or exceed ITD noise criteria of 66 dBA.	Increased traffic volumes will result in 8 receptors to be at or exceed ITD noise criteria of 66 dBA.	Several measures were evaluated to minimize noise impacts, including noise barriers, traffic management, buffer zones, realignment of roadway, and building insulation. None, of the measures meet the minimum requirement for noise reduction.
Utilities and Emergency Services A number of utilities are located within the Project corridor. These include overhead and buried utilities such as power, cable, telephone, fiber optic, and natural gas. Water and sewer lines are proposed. Emergency services are provided by Jerome County Sheriffs Department and the Jerome Fire District #1.	None.	The proposed highway Project will not impact the demand for utilities or emergency services.	ITD will coordinate with utility companies to minimize utility disruptions and will relocate utilities as required by roadway improvements.
Hazardous Materials A review of federal, state, and local databases identified one RCRIS-SQG (small quantity generator) site, one UST site, six FINDS sites, one TRIS site, one TSCA site, and two FTTS sites located adjacent or near the Project corridor.	None.	The UST is located at the Flying J. The access will shift to the north away from the Flying J and will not impact the UST, therefore, no mitigation is required.	None.

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	No Build	Build Alternative	
Geology and Soils The soils in the Project area are mostly very deep, silty loam, well-drained soils. The elevation ranges between approximately 3,700 feet on the south end of the Project corridor to 4,100 feet on the north.	None.	None.	None.
Water Resources There are eight irrigation ponds in the Project area. There are no 100-year floodplains. Groundwater is found about 150 to 400 feet below the surface. It is unknown how many septic systems, drain fields, or sewage lagoons are near the corridor. The Project area is over the Eastern Snake River Plain Aquifer, which is a sole source aquifer as defined by the EPA. A total of 33 wells are located within ¼ mile of the Project area. The water resources along the corridor are all irrigation related and include canals, laterals, ditches, and ponds.	None.	No impact to surface water, floodplains, groundwater, sole source aquifer. Wells and septic systems may be impacted. Some canals and laterals will need to be relocated.	Wells impacted by the Project will be abandoned and capped. Septic systems impacted will be disconnected in accordance with Idaho's requirements. Canals and laterals relocated in coordination with irrigation companies and will be reconstructed to maintain function.
Wetlands and Waters of the U.S. There are no jurisdictional wetlands within the Project corridor. However, the canals, laterals, (except the L4A Lateral), and ditches are considered Waters of the U.S. as they eventually flow into the Snake River. There are 45 square feet of non-jurisdictional wetlands adjacent to the L4A Lateral.	None.	All of the canals, laterals, and ditches that cross the corridor will be affected by the proposed Project. Most will require wider bridges or culverts. The L Canal and its access road will be realigned. 45 square feet of non-jurisdictional wetlands will be impacted.	All of the irrigation facilities will be restored to their prior function following construction. The mitigation for impacting 45 square feet non-jurisdictional wetlands include the preservation of 2.5 acres of fringe area along Almo Creek in Cassia County.

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Vegetation The vast majority of land within the Project corridor is agricultural. There is one undeveloped parcel owned by the BLM. This parcel is a wildlife tract that is managed cooperatively by the BLM and the Idaho Fish and Game. The native vegetation on this site includes grasses (cheat, wheat), rabbitbrush, sagebrush and others.	None.	Property will be acquired from some agricultural properties, but none will be acquired from the BLM tract. The Project will result in minimal effects to naturally occurring vegetation within the existing and proposed right-of-way.	ITD will develop a re-vegetation and planting plan during design. Exposed and impacted areas will be replanted as quickly as possible.
Wildlife and Threatened and Endangered Species The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is responsible for the Endangered Species Act. The Idaho Conservation Data Center maintains a list of threatened, endangered, and candidate species within Idaho, including Jerome County. A total of eight species listed as threatened, endangered, or species of concern could be found in the Project area.	None.	Of all of the threatened, endangered, or species of concern that could be found in the Project area, none are likely to inhabit the area due to a lack of appropriate habitat. The USFWS agreed with FHWA's No Effect Statement meaning that the proposed Project would have no effect on the species protected under the ESA.	None.
Permits	None.	Clean Water Act Section 404, NPDES	None.

TABLE ES-2. SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL CONSTRUCTION EFFECTS AND MITIGATION

Construction Impacts	<i>There will be temporary impacts associated with construction. Potential Effects Below</i>		<i>Mitigation</i>
	<i>No Build</i>	<i>Build Alternative</i>	
Construction Traffic and Access	None.	<p>Short term and temporary impacts to motorists from construction traffic delays.</p> <p>Temporary impact to access to and from adjacent properties.</p> <p>Access and/or parking may be modified during construction.</p>	<p>Construction activities will be planned to minimize traffic detours, congestion, and delays.</p> <p>Advance notice will be given for all road closures; traffic detours, congestion/delays, and reduced use of the existing roadway as practicable.</p> <p>Property and business owners will be able to report construction problems and should be able to expect resolution in a timely manner.</p> <p>Access to businesses and customer parking will be maintained throughout construction.</p>
Construction Noise	None.	<p>During construction, noise levels in the Project area will temporarily increase, especially from internal combustion engines of equipment, impact equipment, and pile drivers. Noise from trucks will affect a larger area.</p>	<p>Temporary impact, no mitigation required.</p>
Construction Air	None.	<p>Construction activities, especially associated with excavation, will temporarily decrease air quality by increased amounts of larger dust particles. Odors may be present during paving.</p>	<p>Water or other dust abatement agents will be applied during construction.</p>

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	<i>No Build</i>	<i>Build Alternative</i>	
Construction Water Quality	None.	Potential for sedimentation and erosion during construction to impact water quality.	Disturbed areas will be reseeded and planted with native vegetation as soon as feasible. BMPs will be used to minimize storm water runoff effects. Irrigation features will be maintained during construction so that farming dependent upon them will continue to be economically viable.
Construction Utilities		Construction will require the relocation and/or re-construction of several utilities.	Advance notice will be given of all anticipated disruptions to utility service.
Construction Irrigation	None.	A total of five irrigation ponds will be affected. Canals and laterals will be realigned and reconstructed.	Water carried by the irrigation facilities will continue to reach farmers during construction. BMPs will be used to maintain the quality of the water within the irrigation facilities during construction.
Construction Hazardous Materials		Construction activities could result in accidental spill of hazardous materials, particularly petroleum products.	The contractor will be required to contain all areas used for refueling. Upon discovery of hazardous materials during construction, the contractor will be required to notify ITD immediately and cease all construction related activities in the area.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires effective and ongoing public participation during the development of an EA. Stakeholders were invited from local governments in Jerome City and Jerome County, Jerome Highway District, North Side Canal Company. In addition, members of the US-93 Citizen Committee and the Jerome Water and Sewer District were invited to provide input. Corridor property owners, business operators and the general public were also invited to participate and included at appropriate times in the process.

The following activities and supporting tools were implemented as part of the public involvement plan to appropriately engage area residents, businesses and affected local governments and resource agencies in the process. These included:

- *Stakeholder Meeting #1* – to introduce the current corridor access management concept plan alternatives and gather comments;
- *Future Land Use Discussion Session* – to understand the planned and potential future land uses along and around the corridor;
- *Public Open House* – to present and gather comments on the recommended alternative; and
- *Public Hearing* – planned to afford formal public review and comment regarding the draft EA document.

A public hearing will be held during the EA public comment period. Comments received during the comment period and comments submitted during the development of the EA as part of scoping and Project alternatives development phases of the Project have been incorporated into this EA.

CONCLUSION

This EA concludes that the project will not cause economic, social, or environmental impacts that cannot be mitigated.